DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 782 SO 019 129

AUTHOR Patrick, John J.
TITLE Teaching and Learning Content in the Social Studies: The ERIC/ChESS Perspective on Trends and Issues.
PUB DATE 9 Apr 88
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Texas Council for the Social Studies (Austin, TX, April 9, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Citizenship Education; Cognitive Processes; *Course Content; Curriculum Design; Curriculum Development; Curriculum Problems; Elementary Secondary Education; Geography Instruction; History Instruction; Political Socialization; Science and Society; *Social Studies

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the current trends and issues in social studies education based on the literature that passes through the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education (Indiana). Four trends pertaining to teaching content in history, geography, civics, and science in society have emerged from a review of the literature. Scholars and professional associations have made strong recommendations for restoring history and geography to a central place in the core curriculum. The new "History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools" states that history and geography are the two great integrative studies of the field. Also, there are calls for the renewal of teaching about the civic values of a constitutional democracy and for the addition of content about science as a powerful social force. Other issues receiving current attention can be viewed in terms of opposing ideas: (1) universalism vs. particularism; (2) content vs. process; and (3) socialization vs. liberation. Advocates of universalism believe all students should learn the same content while proponents for particularism suggest varing content based on student interests. Some educators are placing too much emphasis on the development of high-order cognitive skills while others emphasize content to the point of ignoring those skills. While responsible citizenship in a constitutional democracy involves critical thinking about public policies and issues, a democracy also requires a citizenry with a knowledge of its cultural heritage. It is recommended that the curriculum be balanced between the positions of particularism and universalism; content and process; and socialization and liberation. (SM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED293782

TEACHING AND LEARNING CONTENT IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES: THE ERIC/ChESS PERSPECTIVE ON TRENDS AND ISSUES

by John J. Patrick

Social Studies Development Center
Indiana University
2805 E. 10th Street, Suite 120
Bloomington, IN 47405

SO019129

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
JOHN J. PATRICK

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

TEACHING AND LEARNING CONTENT IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES: THE ERIC/ChESS PERSPECTIVE ON TRENDS AND ISSUES*

by John J. Patrick
Director, Social Studies Development Center
Director, ERIC/ChESS
Professor of Education, Indiana University

Introduction to ERIC/ChESS

Do you want to know about trends in the teaching and learning of history, geography, civics or other subjects in the social studies? Are you curious about issues raised by these trends, such as current arguments about a common core of learning, cultural literacy, critical thinking? Can you use information on alternative positions about curriculum reform? If so, then you are likely to be interested in ERIC/ChESS. And ERIC/ChESS is likely to be very helpful to you!

"ERIC who," many of you may ask? Or more aptly, what is ERIC/ChESS?

ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) is a system of sixteen clearinghouses, which is managed by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education. Each ERIC clearinghouse has responsiblity within the network for acquiring, processing, and reporting about the significant educational literature in its subject field. The ERIC Clearinghouse at Indiana University, which I direct, is responsible for social studies and social science education. It is known by its acronym, ERIC/ChESS.

---

*Prepared for a lecture to the annual meeting of the Leadership Group of the Texas Council for the Social Studies, Austin, Texas, April 9, 1988.

All of you now know who, or I should say, what ERIC/ChESS is. You can find out more about ERIC/ChESS by carefully examining the packet of materials that I have distributed to you, and I trust that each one of you will do this, at your leisure, during the next day or two. For now, I merely want you to know that this ERIC/ChESS packet contains a few examples of the kinds of information products published by our clearinghouse--a news bulletin, books, and ERIC Digests--two-page synopses of literature about trends and issues in social studies education.

Consider the topics of the ERIC Digests in your packet: Critical Thinking in the Social Studies, The Nature of Geographic Literacy, Teaching History in the Elementary School, Teaching the Federalist Papers, Science-Related Social Issues, Improving Writing Skills Through the Social Studies, and The Nature of Economic Literacy. This set of ERIC Digests is reflective of today's trends and issues about the teaching and learning of social studies.

The ERIC/ChESS perspective on these issues is based on a rich flow of information that moves through our clearinghouse in the form of research reports, curriculum guides, conference papers, model classroom lessons, and so forth. We prepare these items for entry into the ERIC database, where it is stored and made available, for a small fee, to you and other educators. Furthermore, we prepare all the entries in social studies for the Current Index to

Journals in Education, which means that all of the important periodical literature in the social studies passes through our hands. So, as part of our mission at ERIC/ChESS, we keep track of trends and issues in the social studies, as indicated by the literature that passes through our clearinghouse.

Given our work at the ERIC Clearinghouse, I am in an excellent position to reflect on current trends and issues in the teaching and learning of content in the social studies. During the balance of this program, I want to share my thoughts with you about a few of these trends and issues, which seem most significant to me.

Four Content Trends

Four content trends that I want to highlight pertain to the teaching and learning of (1) history, (2) geography, (3) civics, and (4) science in a social context.

History. It seems that content in history has always been a major part of the curriculum in social studies. However, the place of this subject in the curriculum has been an issue for most of the 20th century. Educators have argued about how much history to teach, when to teach it, and the purposes of teaching it.

From the 1920s until the 1980s, the curriculum in elementary and secondary schools underwent various changes that dislodged history from its central place in the

required program of studies. This trend in the elementary school was marked by the rise to prominence of the "expanding environments" curriculum plan during the 1930s and thereafter. History was practically pushed out of the primary grades in favor of content drawn from sociology, psychology, and economics, and it was deemphasized in grades four through six.[1]

During the 1980s, there has been a resurgence of interest in the teaching and learning of history, and many recommendations have been made about restoring it to a central place in the core curriculum of all schools. Advocates have represented a wide-range of political and professional interests and have included Secretary of Education William Bennett, California Superintendent of Public Instruction, Bill Honig, Carnegie Foundation spokesman, Ernest Boyer, and leaders of professional associations in history, such as Joan Hoff-Wilson of the Organization of American Historians and James Gardner of the American Historical Association.[2]

The new History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools "is centered in the chronological study of history."[3] And the recent national assessment of student knowledge in history concluded with ringing recommendations about the need to restore history to a prominent place in the curriculum from the primary grades through high school.[4] Furthermore, two new organizations have been

established to study the place of history in the schools and to make recommendations about how to improve the teaching and learning of history: (1) The Bradley Commission on History in the Schools and (2) The National Endowment for the Humanities Research Center on the Teaching and Learning of History in the Schools. The Bradley Commission is a program of the Educational Excellence Network at Columbia University and the NEH Research Center is located at the University of California, Los Angeles.[5]

Geography. In recent years, interest in geography has also revived, as educational reformers have urged that it occupy a position next to history in the center of the core curriculum.[6] The California Framework, for example, says: "History, placed in its geographic setting, establishes human activities in time and place. History and geography are the two great integrative studies of the field. . . . Throughout this curriculum, the importance of the variables of time and place, when and where, history and geography is stressed repeatedly."[7]

The National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) and the Association of American Geographers (AAG) have issued Guidelines for Geographic Education.[8] This publication presents main themes in geography around which to structure a curriculum: Location, Place, Human-Environment Interactions, Movement, and Region. It seems that a consensus is forming around these ideas as fundamentals

of elementary and secondary school education in geography.[9]

The National Geographic Society has joined with the two major professional associations (NCGE and AAG) to form GENIP, the Geographic Education National Implementation Project. One of the project's activities is the Geography Alliance Network, which aims to forge local collaborative programs among academic geographers, classroom teachers, administrators, and others interested in improving the teaching of geography in the schools.

A recent issue of the popular magazine, National Geographic, highlights the Society's new interest in the curriculum of elementary and secondary schools.[10] The rationale for this activity is summed-up by Gilbert M. Grosvenor, President of the National Geographic Society: "The study of geography has always constituted a core element of a sound liberal arts education. The knowledge of geography is basic to our understanding of the world in which we live."[11] Most of our students, however, seem to lack the knowledge that Grosvenor and his collegues laud. Serious deficiencies in course content and students' knowledge have sparked the current movement to upgrade the teaching of geography in elementary and secondary schools.[12]

Civics/Government. A third area of concern about improvement in course content is civics or government. In

particular, there are strong calls for renewal of teaching and learning about civic values of a constitutional democracy and their importance in education for citizenship.[13]

Emphasis on democratic values in Western civilization, with particular emphasis on their development in the United States, is the primary focus of The Education for Democracy Project of the American Federation of Teachers. This project has published its guidelines for strengthening the teaching of civic values of a democracy in a bold and incisive Statement of Principles, which are rooted in the assumptions that "democracy is the worthiest form of human governance ever conceived. . . .

"[A]nd . . . that democracy's survival depends upon our transmitting to each new generation the political vision of liberty and equality that unites us as Americans."[14]

This AFT project recommends that "citizens must know the fundamental ideas central to the political vision of the eighteenth-century founders--the vision that holds us together as one people of many diverse origins and cultures. Not only the words--never only the words--but the sources, the meanings, and the implications of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, the Bill of Rights."[15] Project leaders emphasize reasoned commitment to these civic values; commitment grounded in knowledge and intellectual skills needed to

think deeply and cogently about the meaning and application of these values in societies of the past and present. The project seems to recognize that as students mature, they should have more and more opportunities in school to employ civic values of a constitutional democracy as standards for judgment in response to debates about public issues and policies.[16]

The Center for Civic Education, Council for the Advancement of Citizenship, and the Foundation for Teaching Economics have also launched projects in civics that are designed to upgrade students' knowledge of our American constitutional democracy and their reasoned commitment to its core values.[17] Activities of various projects on the U.S. Constitution, undertaken for the Bicentennial, have done much to revitalize civic education in the schools. These current projects in civic education are designed to sustain high-quality education about constitutional democracy during the Bicentennial and through the years beyond it.[18]

Science and Society. The last content trend on my list is not as widely-recognized as the movements for improvement of teaching and learning in history, geography, and civics. However, this content trend--education about science and society--can be fundamentally connected to curriculum reforms in history, geography, and civics, because it is not about the addition of a new course to the

curriculum or the strengthening of a traditional course, rather it has to do with the enhancement of standard courses through infusion of new subject matter that fits widely-accepted goals about education for citizenship.

Several leadership groups, including the National Council for the Social Studies Committee on Science and Society, have called for addition of content about science as a powerful social force in modern history and in the contemporary world.[19] They argue that without knowledge of science and society in the past and present, one can neither perceive contemporary events accurately, nor think about them cogently, nor act on them responsibly in civic affairs. Thus, they recommend that courses in world history and American history ought to include substantial content about the origins of modern science in Western civilization, the profound social changes that accompanied its development in the West and elsewhere, and the continuing impact of science and science-based technologies on our contempory world.

Courses in geography and civics can also be enhanced by content on science and society. For example, courses in geography, organized around themes such as the interactions of humans with their environment, provide ample openings for studies of science and society. And courses in civics or government offer opportunities to analyze science-related social issues and to make decisions about them.[20]

In particular, it is important to help students understand the idea of science and how this idea became a fudamental part of our civilization. Without this sense of science as a powerful society-shaping idea, our students cannot really appreciate how our contemporary civilization was built and how it is sustained. If our society in large part is defined by our constitutional democracy, it is also characterized by our commitment to science, as a body of knowledge and a way of knowing about events in nature. Science and constitutional democracy in tandem have profoundly influenced our American culture and people, and the social studies curriculum should emphasize the interrelationships of these foundational social forces--science and constitutional democracy.

Curricular neglect, however, has produced extensive ignorance. It seem that a majority of our secondary school students are unaware of science as a social force. Recent assessments of knowledge reveal a large-scale lack of knowledge about the history of science and science-related social issues. Furthermore, there seems to be ambivalence in attitudes about science as a potentially beneficial social endeavor. Thus, it seems that there is need for improved education about science and society in elementary and secondary schools.

Three Types of Issues About Content Trends

The four content trends, which pertain to the teaching of history, geography, civics, and science/society, can be linked to current arguments about the core curriculum in American schools. One way to view these arguments is in terms of pairs of opposing ideas: (1) universalism vs. particularism, (2) content vs. process, (3) socialization vs. liberation. What issues about the teaching and learning of content are raised by these three pairs of ideas? And what are the "pitfalls" of dichotomous responses to these issues? Let's consider these three types of issues about content in the social studies curriculum.

Universalism vs. Particularism. Is a core curriculum of academic subjects appropriate for all students? And should this common content be presented in the same way to all students? Advocates of "universalism" respond with an emphatic YES! They believe that all students ought to learn the same content in the same way. Thus, they have a monolithic view of what should be taught and learned in history, geography, civics, and other essential subjects. The universalist emphasizes human commonalities to the virtual exclusion of human diversity.[21]

By contrast, "particularism" is the polar position that dwells on differences in human interests and needs to the practical exclusion of commonalities. The extreme

particularist vehemently opposes the very idea of a core curriculum--a body of knowledge that all students should learn. Rather, particularists focus on individual and social differences, and social diversity looms much larger than social unity in their educational goals.[22]

When particularists dominate our thinking about the curriculum, we end up with so-called "shopping mall" high schools with curricula that seem more like a "cafeteria" than a restuarant that clearly separates the main courses from other items on the menu.[23] Excellence in education tends to be a casualty of this approach, as academic standards and achievement tend to decline.

When universalists hold sway, equity for disadvantaged students and for various ethnic minorities tends to suffer. Many students see the curriculum as an unfair obstacle to the kind of education they want or need, and they drop out of school.[24]

The claims of both sides, the universalists and particularists, have some merit, but only as they are blended and balanced, and never in their extreme forms. After all, our American nation was founded on the idea of unity out of diversity (E pluribus unum). And the claims and counterclaims of "pluribus" and "unum" have risen and fallen, back and forth, across two hundred years of our national history. For now, however, given our recent past, it seems that we need more "unum" and less "pluribus"--but

always, now and later on, there should be concern for both sides of this perennial issue and avoidance of both extreme positions.[25]

Thus, core curriculum proposals, based on content in history, geography, civics, and economics, have considerable appeal, because of the contribution they can make to national unity, social cohesion, and the empowerment of minorities within the mainstream culture. But supporters of this position, to achieve a reasonable measure of both excellence and equity, must heed the caution that core content should be taught with recognition of and sensitivity to individual and group differences of the learners.

Content vs. Process. Another controversy about core content and common learning revolves around the teaching and learning of cognitive processes. The obvious value of intellectually-active learning and development of higher-order cognitive skills leads some educators to an extreme emphasis on formal thinking processes. They tend to believe that any content is as good as any other, that no subjects or more or less worthy of emphasis in the curriculum. In this position, there is no essential knowledge; subject matter to which cognitive process skills are applied might vary with the interests of students in timely topics, social problems, or public issues. This approach to teaching and learning is supposed to develop generalizable skills that might be transferred pervasively to various subjects within

and outside of school.[26]

The other side of this position narrowly emphasizes content to the point of obscuring or ignoring higher-level learning and cognition. Advocates of this position seem to believe that good education consists only in transmitting essential facts to passive learners.[27]

Research seems to reject the extreme positions in this argument about the primacy of content or process. It seems that a sound curriculum involves continuous and systematic blending of content and process, of the acquisition and application of knowledge. Cognitive processes and core content are equally important and should be treated in concert.[28]

Content is more likely to be learned in-depth and remembered over time if learners are required to interact with it--to interpret, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate knowledge, not merely to receive and regurgitate it.[29] However, some bodies of knowledge are more important than others in development of these cognitive skills. It seems that cognitive processes, such as critical thinking and decision making, are most effectively taught and learned in terms of particular structures of knowledge (e.g., academic disciplines such as history, geography, or economics). Thus, development of cognitive process skills is enhanced by connecting education about them to core content in particular academic disciplines of the social studies.[30]

Socialization vs. Liberation. A third ongoing argument about the teaching and learning of core content in the social studies can be cast in terms of socialization and liberation. Socialization is the transmission from one generation to another of a society's heritage and traditions, its social conventions and institutions, its way of life. Socialization is a major function of formal education in every society, and every system of education has the mission of producing mature individuals who fit the culture, who believe and behave in accord with the norms.[31]

A democracy, no less than an autocracy, requires citizens who have the knowledge, values, skills, and character that are supportive of the social structure. In an autocracy or any other kind of despotic regime, socialization is typically the overriding end of education. But the conditions of education for citizenship in a constitutional democracy are not so simple, because the defining principles of constitutional democracy, in the United States and elsewhere, include both majority rule and the liberty of individuals to disagree with the majority. Furthermore, responsible citizenship in a constitutional democracy involves critical thinking about public policies and issues, which may result, from time to time, in the advancement of positions that oppose an incumbent government or the will of the majority of citizens.[32]

So, education for "good" citizenship in a constitutional democracy involves both socialization and social criticism; it is supposed to develop reasoned commitment and conformity to the society's norms and also a propensity for reasoned dissent from public policies or actions that seem to violate the underlying values or principles of the system.

The highly-respected historian of American education, Lawrence Cremin, has eloquently expressed the paradoxical relationship of socialization and liberation in schools:

> "On the one hand schooling, like every other agency of deliberate nurture, socializes: it tends to convey the prevailing values and attitudes of the community or subcommunity that sponsors it. On the other hand, schooling, insofar as it exposes individuals to people and ideas not already encountered at home or in church, liberates and extends. As with the printed matter that is the essence of its instruction, schooling--like education in general--never liberates without at the same time limiting. It never frees without at the same time socializing. The question is not whether one or the other is occuring in isolation but what the balance is, and to what end, and in light of what alternatives."[33]

Educators in our constitutional democracy who advocate closed-minded transmission of the culture, who try to

socialize students without at the same time liberating them--these educators violate values that undergird our democratic system. However, educators who ignore their mission of cultural transmission place their culture at risk, because no way of life can survive a generation that neither knows it nor values it. So, the paradoxical claims of socialization and liberation somehow must be blended and balanced in our education of the young, because our democratic society requires both commitment and criticism to maintain its health and vigor.

Conclusion.

From my vantage point at the ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, I have offered a perspective on current trends and issues in our field. I have focused on trends and issues having to do with the teaching and learning of core content in history, geography, civics, and science/society. And I have offered recommendations about how to respond to certain issues: universalism vs. particularism, content vs. process, and socialization vs. liberation. My treatment of these trends and issues is grounded in the literature of our field, which passes through our ERIC Clearinghouse and is monitored by the ERIC/ChESS staff.

In closing, I invite each of you to make use of the ERIC database through computerized searches of it and

through consumption of ERIC/ChESS information products. These services to users of ERIC are described in the packets of materials that have been distributed to you.

I also invite each of you to contribute to the ERIC database. We want examples of curriculum guides, lesson plans or units of study, and reports about teaching and learning in elementary and secondary schools. So, please send these kinds of items to us for consideration as entries into the database. Information about how to submit documents to ERIC can be found in the previously distributed packets of materials.

I hope my discussion of trends and issues, which was based on information in the ERIC system, has stimulated both your interest in ERIC/ChESS and in current developments in our field of social studies education.

Notes

1. Diane Ravitch, "Tot Sociology, Or What Happened to History in the Grade School," The American Scholar 56 (Summer 1987): 343-354.

2. William J. Bennett, James Madison High School: A Curriculum for American Students (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1987); Ernest L. Boyer, High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America (New York: Harper & Row, 1983); History-Social Science Framework

and Criteria Committee, History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (Sacramento: California State Board of Education, 1988). In addition, see John D. Hoge and Claudia Crump, Teaching History in the Elementary School (Bloomington, IN: Social Studies Development Center and ERIC/ChESS, 1988).

3. Ibid., 4.

4. Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, Jr. What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know? A Report on the First National Assessment of History and Literature (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

5. The NEH History Research Center at U.C.L.A. is directed by Charlotte Crabtree; the Bradley Commission has an office at 26915 Westwood Road, Suite A-2, Westlake, Ohio 44145; Paul Gagnon is principal investigator.

6. C.L, Salter, "The Essence of Geography," Basic Education Issues, Answers & Facts 2 (Winter 1987): 2-4.

7. The California Framework, 4

8. Joint Committee on Geographic Education, Guidelines for Geographic Education: Elementary and Secondary Schools (Washington, DC: Association of American Geographers and National Council for Geographic Education, 1984.

9. Alan Backler and Joseph Stoltman, "The Nature of Geographic Literacy," ERIC Digest No. 35 (November 1986).

10. Lloyd B. Elliott, "President Grosvenor Announces the National Geographic Society Education Foundation," National Geographic 173 (March 1988) 329a-329d.

11. Gilbert M. Grosvenor, "Geography and The Liberal Arts," Basic Education Issues, Answers & Facts 2 (Winter 1987): 5.

12. David Pierpont Gardner, "Geography in the School Curriculum," Annals of the Association of American Geographers 76 (1986): 1-4.

13. Paul Gagnon, Education for Democracy, A Statement of Prnciples: Guidelines for Strengthening the Teaching of Democratic Values (Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers, 1987).

14. Ibid., 8.

15. Ibid., 15.

16. Ibid., 14-16.

17. As part of the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, the Foundation for Teaching Economics and the Constitutional Rights Foundation are leading a national effort to create an innovative new civics curriculum for students in grades eight and nine, which is titled Our Democracy: How America Works.

18. Mary Jane Turner, "Resources for Teaching about the Constitution," Social Education (51 (September 1987): 350-355.

19. Faith M. Hickman et al., Science/Technology/Society: A Framework for Curriculum Reform in Secondary School Science and Social Studies (Boulder, CO: Social Science Education Consortium, 1987).

20. Ibid.

21. Elliot W. Eisner and Elizabeth Vallance, "Five Conceptions of Curriculum," in Eisner and Vallance, editors, Conflicting Conceptions of Curriculum (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1974), 14-16.

22. Arthur G. Powell, et al., The Shopping Mall High School (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985).

23. Ibid.

24. Elliot W. Eisner and Elizabeth Vallance, "Five Conceptions of Curriculum," 15.

25. R. Freeman Butts, The Revival of Civic Learning (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa, 1980).

26. Catherine Cornbleth, "Critical Thinking and Cognitive Processes," in William B. Stanley, editor, Review of Research in Social Studies Education: 1976-1983 (Washington, DC: National Council for the Social Studies in association with ERIC/ChESS, 1985), 11-63.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. R. Freeman Butts, The Revival of Civic Learning.

32. Ibid.

33. Lawrence Cremin, Traditions of American Education (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1975), 35.